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Huxley's Feelies:

## The Cinema of Sensation in *Brave New World*

Laura Frost

“I have just been, for the first time, to see and hear a picture talk,” Aldous Huxley writes in a 1929 essay called “Silence Is Golden” (*Essays* 2: 19). “A little late in the day,” he imagines his “up-to-date” reader remarking “with a patronizing and contemptuous smile.” After all, the film that introduces Huxley to the world of sound cinema, *The Jazz Singer*, had been released two years earlier. The “gigantically enlarged” (21) images on the screen spouting noise send Huxley into paroxysms of scorn and fury; he is especially horrified by the scene in which Al Jolson sings “Mammy” in blackface:

My flesh crept as the loud-speaker poured out those sodden words, that greasy, sagging melody. I felt ashamed of myself for listening to such things, for even being a member of the species to which such things are addressed. (23)

While only half feigning his reactionary pose, Huxley condemns the talkies as “the latest and most frightful creation-saving device for the production of standardized amusement” (20).

Huxley’s violent response to *The Jazz Singer* is a window onto a key moment in the history of cinema, when articles such as “Silence Is Golden,” “Why ‘Talkies’ Are Unsound” (Betts), “Ordeal by ‘Talkie’” (Betts), and “The Movies Commit Suicide” (Seldes) contended with equally impassioned defenses of sound film.<sup>1</sup> The crisis occasioned by the coming of sound now appears as an overblown objection to a transition that in hindsight seems inevitable. But just as the cinema itself was often perceived as revolutionary—George Bernard Shaw remarked in 1914

that “The cinema is going to form the mind of England. . . . The cinema is a much more momentous invention than the printing press” (9)<sup>2</sup>—the coming of sound was greeted by many as a watershed moment. Beyond the changes in the industry (the retirement of actors who had unpleasant voices, for example), the talkies raised more philosophical questions about the social, moral, and even physical effects of moving and talking images.

Cinema history would not be accurately represented by a chronicle of technical development from, say, Muybridge to the present. Such a history would miss a crucial component of the story of cinema: spectatorship. Accounts from the period such as Huxley’s and Iris Barry’s *Let’s Go to the Pictures* emphasize not just what happens on the screen, but how the audience responds. Those responses are strikingly different from how we now think of cinema spectatorship, and this is particularly true of the reception of the talkies. Recently critics such as Tom Gunning, Miriam Hansen, Jonathan Crary, and Ben Singer, following the early lead of Walter Benjamin<sup>3</sup> and Siegfried Kracauer, have moved away from the psychoanalytic approach that dominated film criticism in the 1980s to a more historical and sociological model that addresses how visual modernity in general and cinema spectatorship in particular are bodily, visceral experiences. Cinema is not merely a screen for psychic identifications but is experienced by an embodied, somatically affected spectator. While the story of Lumière’s train sending confused audiences screaming from the screen in 1895 has been debunked,<sup>4</sup> writing from the time of “Silence Is Golden” demonstrates Kracauer’s assertion that film was thought of as influencing “the spectator’s senses, engaging him physiologically before he is in a position to respond intellectually” (*Theory* 158). Gunning’s description of the earliest filmmaking as a “cinema of attractions” (121) striving more for spectacle than telling a story and Singer’s examination of early “blood and thunder” melodramas, among other work, suggest that modern technologies of vision were experienced as mobilizing the body and actively producing what Hansen calls “a new sensorium” (70). Different stages of cinematic development produced different modes of spectatorship and perception, and this was especially true of the transition to sound.

Huxley’s disgust at *The Jazz Singer* reflects an impassioned assessment of the talkies that brings him into dialogue with Shaw, Barry, Charlie Chaplin, Kracauer, and other contemporaries. Among all his writing on

cinema over five decades, the most illuminating appears in an unlikely source: his best-known novel, *Brave New World*. His 1932 dystopic fiction provides unexpected insight into a time when cinema's technological innovations were not just observed but were truly felt.<sup>5</sup> Huxley's response to early cinema—and especially the transition to sound—was far-reaching in its implications, recognizing cinema's stimulation of the body as well as the mind and imagining cinema's potential to be either an instrument of social and political reform or a medium of cultural degeneracy.

In some ways, the reception of early film (the “youngest” art, as Virginia Woolf put it in her 1926 essay “The Cinema” [272]) is very much in keeping with that of mass culture in general. In the twenties and thirties, from Kracauer's “distraction factories” (*Mass Ornament* 75–76) to Q. D. Leavis's descriptions of popular reading as masturbatory (136) or a drug habit (31), mass culture consumption was described as intoxication, addiction, deluded reverie, and gluttony. All of these tropes were applied to cinema, but the specific circumstances of cinemagoing were also thought to produce a distinctive reaction in the viewer. In a 1925 *Vanity Fair* essay called “Where Are the Movies Moving?” Huxley writes that “the darkness of the theater, the monotonous music” induce in the audience “a kind of hypnotic state” (*Essays* 1: 176).<sup>6</sup> In an article for *Close Up*, Bryher describes a stupefied film audience: “To watch hypnotically something which has become a habit and which is not recorded as it happens by the brain, differs little from the drugtaker's point of view” (qtd. in Richards, 199).<sup>7</sup> Both hypnosis and intoxication influence mind and body, suggesting that the cinema spectator is vulnerable on two fronts.

The reception of film had its roots in responses to mass culture such as amusement parks, radio, and other leisure technologies that appealed to the body in new ways. Film was already conceived of as a bodily experience when it was silent, but the addition of sound made the connection more pronounced. In 1930 Charlie Chaplin maintained: “I shall never speak in a film. I hate the talkies and will not produce talking films. . . . My shadow appears on the screen as in a dream, and dreams do not speak” (qtd. in Crafton 374). For Chaplin, the cinematic experience of ephemeral, mute dreaming was shattered by the talkies, which forced a new kind of embodiment on the medium. Many remarked on the physical difficulties that the new technologies presented to the audience. In “The Cinema” Virginia Woolf writes of film spectatorship: “The eye licks it all up instantaneously, and the brain, agreeably titillated, settles

down to watch things happening without beseeching itself to think. . . . Eye and brain are torn ruthlessly as they try vainly to work in couples" (269). This sense of dislocation is supported by Iris Barry's contemporaneous observation that "Every habitual cinema-goer must have been struck at some time or another by the comparative slowness of perception and understanding of a person not accustomed to the pictures: the newcomer always misses half of what occurs" (13). The idea of a population divided between those who had been initiated into the new physical practice of cinema spectatorship and those who had not marked a unique and brief moment in film history.

Huxley presents himself as such a newcomer in "Silence Is Golden," but despite his pose of being wilfully out of date, he had a music and theatre column in the *Weekly Westminster Gazette*, and he wrote on a wide range of cultural topics for mass-market journals including *Vanity Fair* and *Esquire*. Yet he seems to join other interwar critics who conflate all forms of mass or popular culture. In a 1927 article for *Harper's* called "The Outlook for American Culture: Some Reflections in a Machine Age," he writes:

The rotary press, the process block, the cinema, the radio, the phonograph, are used not, as they might so easily be used, to propagate culture, but its opposite. All the resources of science are applied in order that imbecility may flourish and vulgarity cover the whole earth. (*Essays* 2: 9)

The cinema is one in a series of horrors here, but elsewhere Huxley singles it out as especially pernicious. In a 1923 essay on popular culture called "Pleasures," he writes:

Of all the various poisons which modern civilization, by a process of auto-intoxication, brews quietly up within its own bowels, few, it seems to me, are more deadly (while none appears more harmless) than that curious and appalling thing that is technically known as "pleasure." "Pleasure" (I place the word between inverted commas to show that I mean, not real pleasure, but the organized activities officially known by the same name) "pleasure"—what nightmare visions the word evokes! . . . The horrors of modern "pleasure" arise from the fact that every kind of organized distraction tends to become progressively more and more imbecile. . . . In place of the old pleasures demanding intel-

ligence and personal initiative, we have vast organizations that provide us with ready-made distractions—distractions which demand from pleasure-seekers no personal participation and no intellectual effort of any sort. To the interminable democracies of the world a million cinemas bring the same balderdash. . . . Countless audiences soak passively in the tepid bath of nonsense. No mental effort is demanded of them, no participation; they need only sit and keep their eyes open. (*Essays* 1: 355–56)

Huxley juxtaposes “old” pleasure—“real pleasure” that is individualized and intellectually demanding—with “ready made,” collective pleasures. When Huxley warns about pleasures that “demand . . . no personal participation,” he pinpoints those that are particularly corporeal. His example is telling. The scene of lazy cinema audiences in “Pleasures” is one that recurs throughout Huxley’s writing, such as the people “sitting at the picture palace passively accepting ready-made day-dreams from Hollywood” in *Eyeless in Gaza* (355).<sup>8</sup> For Huxley, far from being a technological advancement, cinema is symptomatic of cultural degeneration, and the introduction of sound was a particularly alarming development because of its implications for bodily pleasure.

All of Huxley’s writings on cinema are arranged around the dichotomy presented in “Pleasures.”<sup>9</sup> It is integral to his vision of futurity in *Brave New World*. London in the Year A. F. (After Ford) 632 is a culture of genetic and psychological control; individuals are decanted into a state whose motto is “Community, Identity, Stability” (3). Huxley’s novel is famous for its bottled babies, color-coded classes, hypnopaedic conditioning, and the pharmacological marvel soma. As much as it is a nightmare of a totalitarian, genetically engineered future, though, *Brave New World* is also a cautionary tale about a world in which artifacts of high culture are held under lock and key while the populace is supplied with “imbecile” entertainment. The denizens of Brave New World follow a prescribed routine of “standardized amusement” summarized by the Resident World Controller for Western Europe, Mustapha Mond, as “Seven and a half hours of mild, unexhausting labour, and then the *soma* ration and games and unrestricted copulation and the feelies” (224).

The “feelies,” a cinema of titillating, pansensual stimulation, are clearly a response to the “talkies,” as Huxley extends the innovation of synchronized sound to include all the senses. The most intense vehicle of mass pleasure in *Brave New World*, the feelies have a special status insofar as

they are artistic productions: Mond describes them as “works of art out of practically nothing but pure sensation” (221). In a central scene, John the Savage, newly exported from the Malpais Indian Reservation, attends a feely called *Three Weeks in a Helicopter*. Billed as “AN ALL-SUPER-SINGING, SYNTHETIC-TALKING, COLOURED, STEREOSCOPIC FEELY WITH SYNCHRONIZED SCENT-ORGAN ACCOMPANIMENT” (167), a parody of the 1920s cinema slogan, “All-Talking, All-Singing, All-Dancing,”<sup>10</sup> *Three Weeks in a Helicopter* is three-dimensional and scented, with tactile sensations produced by metal knobs embedded in the cinema chairs. The “almost intolerable galvanic pleasure” that the feely transmits provokes in John a rage at its sensual indulgence (168)—a rage similar to Huxley’s at the cheap emotion and audio excess of *The Jazz Singer*.

Mond explains to John that in the Brave New World there is “no leisure from pleasure, not a moment to sit down and think” (55). Pleasure has become a full-time job. Here Huxley would seem to fit the old stereotype of the modernist elitist who shores up what Huyssen calls the “great divide,” although his relationship to modernism itself is complicated. While his work, for the most part, is not formally innovative enough to qualify as modernist according to a typical definition, his conflicting responses to cinema do bear out recent revaluations of the great divide paradigm such as David Chinitz’s and Michael North’s.<sup>11</sup> One of the cultural ironies of Huxley’s fate in twentieth-century culture is the way he has been taken up by the popular culture he claims to despise (the title of his most famous novel has become a catchphrase) and in his absence from most critical discussions of modernism. His responses to popular culture and the cinema in particular suggest both why it is difficult to make a full-fledged modernist out of Huxley and how he exemplifies the more recent critical paradigms of modernism.

*Brave New World* has typically been read as “the classic denunciation of mass culture in the interwar years” (Carey 86). Certainly, associated with mass culture, pleasure is not characteristically ascribed to modernism, where alienation, anomie, and crisis typically overshadow moments of sweetness and light;<sup>12</sup> still less is pleasure typically associated with dystopic texts. Accordingly, Theodor Adorno argues that Huxley in *Brave New World* is “inwardly an enemy of intoxication”:

[T]he regularly occurring communal orgies and the prescribed short-term change of partners are logical consequences of the

jaded official sexual routine that turns pleasure to fun and denies it by granting it. But precisely in the impossibility of looking pleasure in the eye, of making use of reflection in abandoning one's whole self to pleasure, the ancient prohibition for which Huxley prematurely mourns continues in force. (104–05)

Yet despite the broad satire of the feelies' idiocy, Huxley does not portray them as lacking in attraction—like the mechanistic Tiller Girls, for example, whom Kracauer characterizes as “sexless bodies in bathing suits” (*Mass Ornament* 67)—and his opposition to intoxication is not uniform: John's rejection of the feelies and other sensual pleasures is represented as a puritanical hysteria of which Huxley is as critical as he is of thoughtless consumption of the feelies, soma, and orgy porgy. Indeed, Adorno's observation about Lenina (whose characteristics—sensual, female, modern—code her as an embodiment of mass culture) applies equally to the feelies: “Lenina's artificial charm and cellophane shamelessness produce by no means the unerotic effect Huxley intended, but rather a highly seductive one, to which even the infuriated cultural savage succumbs at the end of the novel” (105–06). This ambivalence about the power of cinema is expressed through the complex allusions around which Huxley constructs *Three Weeks in a Helicopter*. Representing the confusion of sound and image in early cinema and the association of the filmgoer with the drugged, unconscious, or bestial body, the feelies provide both a cautionary tale and a vision of cinema's social possibilities.

## Every hair of the bear

Although the feelies are pap for the public, their institutional structure indicates their importance in *Brave New World*. (While the movies were increasingly thought of as an American product, Huxley portrays the feelies themselves as a markedly British industry.) The “Feeling Picture” headquarters comprise 22 floors of the Bureau of Propaganda in London (66), the “buildings of the Hounslow Feely Studio” sprawl over “seven and a half hectares” (62), and the College of Emotional Engineering includes on its faculty “professors of feelies,” a title of considerable status (67). John is escorted to the feelies by the “pneumatic” Lenina Crowne, to whose attractive physique, good-natured promiscuity, and provocative clothes (hot pants, boots, and zippered lingerie) Huxley calls considerable attention. *Three Weeks in a Helicopter* is apparently a very good feely. In the



opening pages of the novel, the Assistant Predestinator tells Henry Ford, “I hear the new [feely] at the Alhambra is first-rate. There’s a love scene on a bearskin rug; they say it’s marvellous. Every hair of the bear reproduced. The most amazing tactual effects” (35).

Huxley’s choice of venue for *Three Weeks in a Helicopter*, the Alhambra, evokes a rich history of British popular entertainment. Built on Leicester Square in 1854 and known initially as the Royal Panopticon of Science and Art, the Alhambra’s first of many subsequent incarnations was as a Victorian shrine to scientific exhibitions, a combination of intellectual curiosity and industry that would fall into Huxley’s category of “real” pleasure. In 1858 it became the Alhambra Circus and then, in 1864, the Alhambra Music Hall. The building was demolished in 1936 to clear room for a cinema, the Odeon, as if fulfilling T. S. Eliot’s apocalyptic prophecy about the passing of music hall culture and the rise of “the cheap and rapid-breeding cinema” (*Prose* 174). The transformations of the Alhambra to accommodate the evolution of popular pleasure embody what Huxley and others saw as cultural degeneration, and hence is a fitting forum for the feelies.

Huxley’s feelies reach backward to cinema’s music hall origins and forward to the imagination of technologies such as virtual reality. *Three Weeks in a Helicopter* is preceded by a performance inspired by music hall “turns” that were a feature of early cinema presentations and had more in common with vaudeville than today’s “coming attractions.” The performances preceding films in the twenties were a varied roster of “shorts” that included humorous acts, newsreels, cartoons, travel and nature films, and musical performances. *Three Weeks in a Helicopter* begins with an overture by a scent-organ that plays

a delightfully refreshing Herbal Capriccio—rippling arpeggios of thyme and lavender, of rosemary, basil, myrtle, tarragon; a series of daring modulations through the spice keys into ambergris; and a slow return through sandalwood, camphor, cedar and new-mown hay (with occasional subtle touches of discord—a whiff of kidney pudding, the faintest suspicion of pig’s dung). . . . Sunk in their pneumatic stalls, Lenina and the Savage sniffed and listened. (166–67)

The novelty of the scent-organ is its synesthetic effects that are strongly reminiscent of the instrument in Huysman’s *A Rebours*, in which sounds

correspond to smells and flavors. Max Nordau's notorious critique of Huysman's decadent *Des Esseintes*—"a parasite of the lowest grade of atavism" (309)—is specifically connected to the synesthetic effect of symbolist art, which Nordau calls

a retrogression to the very beginning of organic development. It is a descent from the height of human perfection to the low level of the mollusc. To raise the combination, transposition and confusion of the perceptions of sound and sight to the rank of a principle of art, to see futurity in this principle, is to designate as progress the return from the consciousness of man to that of the oyster. (142)

The "confusion" of sound and sight that characterized the talkies was a sign of cultural regression for Huxley, as it was for many critics. "The soul of the film," Ernest Betts opined, "its eloquence and vital silence," is, with the addition of sound, "destroyed. The film now returns to the circus from whence it came, among the freaks and fat ladies" (*Heraclitus* 88).

Beyond the complaints about poorly executed sound films, there was a more far-reaching philosophical/aesthetic argument against the talkies: the contention that each art should stay within and develop according to its own limits, and that images rather than sound "must be/are the primary carriers of the film's meaning and structure" (Altman, Introduction 14). Rudolf Arnheim's essay "A New Laocoön: Artistic Composites and the Talking Film" is the classic statement of this point, one reiterated by many others, including Charlie Chaplin:

People blather of "talking films" and coloured films and stereoscopic films. I can't abide coloured etchings, and on the stage we already have a perfect three dimensions. Why, we lose half our quality if we lose our limitations. Motion, two planes, and a suggestion of depth: that is our chaos from which we will fashion our universe. (82)

Huxley makes a similar argument in "Where Are the Movies Moving?" He delightfully describes a silent sequence in which his "favorite dramatic hero, Felix the Cat," is shown singing, as indicated by "little black notes" issuing from his mouth. The cartoon cat "reaches up, catches a few handfuls" of notes and makes a scooter out of them on which he rides off. "Seen on the screen," Huxley marvels, "this conversion of song into

scooters seems the most natural, simple, and logical thing in the world” (*Essays* 1: 175). This example, for Huxley,

indicates very clearly what are the most pregnant potentialities of the cinema; it shows how cinematography differs from literature and the spoken drama and how it may be developed into something entirely new. What the cinema can do better than literature is to be fantastic.

The defense of sound was most famously articulated by Sergei Eisenstein, W. I. Pudovkin, and G. V. Alexandrov in their 1928 “Statement on Sound,” which advocates montage and “the creation of a new orchestral counterpoint of sight-images and sound-images” (86). Still more radically, in an essay called “Synchronization of Senses,” Eisenstein describes how a “single, unifying sound-picture image” might be developed as a “polyphonic structure” that “achieves its total effect through the composite sensation of all the pieces as a whole” (*Film Sense* 77). Pointing to examples of synesthetic art including Rimbaud’s “‘color’ sonnet” and James McNeill Whistler’s “color symphonies” (87), Eisenstein proposes that such effects could be achieved in cinema. “To remove the barriers between sight and sound, between the seen world and the heard world,” he rhapsodizes, “To bring about a unity and a harmonious relationship between these two opposite spheres. What an absorbing task! The Greeks and Diderot, Wagner and Scriabin—who has not dreamt of this ideal?” It is the ideal of the *Gesamtkunstwerk*, the “total work of art” that synthesizes multiple media: precisely the reverse of the Laocoön argument, which Huxley seems to advocate. With the feelies, Huxley (who found Wagner “vulgarly emotional” [*Essays* 1: 207]) imagines a superb parody of *Gesamtkunstwerk* inspired by the talkies’ “unnatural” addition of sound to image. Film alone among forms of mass culture has this fearsome potential to expand indefinitely, both aesthetically and socially, to Huxley.<sup>13</sup>

Huxley’s feelies link cultural degeneration and artistic decadence. The posture of the audience, “sunk in their pneumatic stalls” (a word evocative of both the music hall and the barnyard as well as Eliot’s Grishkin, whose “friendly bust / Gives promises of pneumatic bliss” [31]) suggests a submissive absorption of stimuli. The scent organ transports its audience through a gamut of sensations that are but a preamble to the main attraction, *Three Weeks in a Helicopter*:

Suddenly, dazzling and incomparably more solid-looking than they would have seemed in actual flesh and blood, far more real than reality, there stood the stereoscopic images, locked in one another's arms, of a gigantic negro and a golden-haired young brachycephalic Beta-Plus female. The stereoscopic lips came together . . . and . . . the facial erogenous zones of the six thousand spectators in the Alhambra tingled with almost intolerable galvanic pleasure. (168)

The plot, like the pornographic films it resembles, is "extremely simple" (168). The characters sing a duet and make "a little love . . . on that famous bearskin, every hair of which . . . could be separately and distinctly felt." The "negro" develops "an exclusive and maniacal passion" for "the Beta blonde" and "ravished [her] away into the sky and kept [her] there, hovering, for three weeks in a wildly anti-social tête-à-tête" (168-69). She is rescued by

three handsome young Alphas . . . and the film ended happily and decorously, with the Beta blonde becoming the mistress of all her three rescuers. . . . Then the bearskin made a final appearance and, amid a blare of sexophones, the last stereoscopic kiss faded into darkness, the last electric titillation died on the lips like a dying moth that quivers, quivers, ever more feebly, ever more faintly, and at last is quiet, quite still. (169)

While Lenina's "flushed" arousal by the feely is appropriate to her conditioning, John is "pale, pained, desiring, and ashamed of his desire." He tells Lenina, "I don't think you ought to see things like that. . . . It was base . . . ignoble" (169). The feelies and the shallow, promiscuous culture they represent drive the Savage to retreat to the countryside, where he mortifies his body. Darwin Bonaparte, "the Feely Corporation's most expert big game photographer," stalks and films John's acts:

He kept his telescopic cameras carefully aimed—glued to their moving objective; clapped on a higher power to get a close-up of the frantic and distorted face (admirable!); switched over, for half a minute, to slow motion (an exquisitely comical effect, he promised himself); listened in, meanwhile, to the blows, the groans, the wild and raving words that were being recorded on the sound-track at the edge of his film, tried the effect of a little

amplification (yes, that was decidedly better). . . . When they had put in the feely effects at the studio, it would be a wonderful film. (253)

Bonaparte's efforts culminate in a hit feely feature called *The Savage of Surrey* that "could be seen, heard and felt in every first-class feely-palace in Western Europe" (254). With its alliterative play on Robert Flaherty's popular 1922 film *Nanook of the North*, *The Savage of Surrey* perversely assimilates John to the form of mass culture most foul to him, and the ensuing publicity contributes to his suicide. The novel's concluding scene presents John's dangling feet cinematically:

Slowly, very slowly, like two unhurried compass needles, the feet turned towards the right; north, north-east, east, south-east, south, south-south-west; then paused, and, after a few seconds, turned as unhurriedly back towards the left. South-south-west, south, south-east, east. . . .

With John's death, the last chance for culture perishes. Horrified by what he sees as the animalistic amorality of the Brave New World and hunted and framed as an animal himself in *The Savage of Surrey*, John is a casualty of popular culture: death by feelies.

## Goats and monkeys

The particular feely Huxley describes in *Brave New World* is a composite of parody and allusion that draws together even more specific debates about the implications of sound cinema. While *Three Weeks in a Helicopter* seems to be an assemblage of random stupidity subordinated to its more spectacular effects, it is in fact a strategic amalgamation of the two kinds of pleasure Huxley delineates in "Pleasures" as "old" and "modern." The feely's title and its most memorable "tactual effect" allude to a 1907 best-selling romance novel called *Three Weeks* by one of the most prolific genre writers of the era, Elinor Glyn. Glyn is best known now for her novel *It* and the silent film adaptation that launched Clara Bow's career as the "It Girl." After Glyn's debut as an extra in a Cecil B. de Mille film, she wrote over a dozen screenplays for major studios. To skeptics such as Huxley, Glyn represented the nadir of both contemporary fiction and popular cinema. Robert Graves and Alan Hodge observe that in the teens and twenties, "Glyn was the reigning queen of popular love literature and con-

sidered 'very hot stuff' among the 'low-brow public'" (42).<sup>14</sup> In *Fiction and the Reading Public*, Q. D. Leavis caustically remarks that "famous authors of bestsellers are run as limited companies with a factory called 'Edgar Rice Burroughs, Inc.' or 'Elinor Glyn Ltd'" (50). In Huxley's scheme of old and new pleasures, he chooses Glyn, Hollywood doyenne, to epitomize debased modern amusement.

*Three Weeks* tells the story of an affair between Paul, a listless upper-class British man, and the queen of an unnamed Eastern European nation. She tells Paul, "You must help to stem the tide of your nation's decadence, and be a strong man" (199).<sup>15</sup> But decadence of an order that would have enraged Max Nordau is exactly what follows. In the climactic scene of the novel, Paul finds the queen reclining on a magnificent tigerskin rug, gripping a *fleur du mal* in her teeth. She writhes around ("like a snake," Glyn writes, no less than four times [86, 87, 88, 134]), and the tactile stimuli—slithery snakeskin and soft fur—are as confused as Glyn's mixed metaphors: "She purred as a tiger might have done while she undulated like a snake" (134). Nature takes its course, and Paul impregnates her. Several critics have read *Three Weeks* as a eugenics novel, a theme that would have overlapped with Huxley's interests in *Brave New World*.<sup>16</sup> However, it is the more sensational features of Glyn's novel that inspired *Three Weeks in a Helicopter*.

Glyn's novel became an instant success in Britain and was filmed twice, in 1915 and 1924.<sup>17</sup> Glyn played up the tigerskin scene by posing with just such a rug in publicity photographs, and this prop is rendered absurd in Huxley's novel, with the characters exclaiming about the feely's simulation of the bearskin rug. Rebecca West commented that Glyn represented an "appalling . . . school of fiction . . . that imagines that by cataloging stimuli one can produce a feeling of stimulation" (73), implying that such fiction is essentially pornographic—an apt description of the feelies, whose purpose is precisely to "produce a feeling of stimulation." In this respect, the feelies resemble the early "cinema of attractions," which, Gunning argues, appealed to an audience more interested in the display of spectacle and the "act of looking" than the development of a particular narrative (121).

In a 1915 letter in which he discusses D. H. Lawrence's censorship problems with *The Rainbow*, Huxley writes, "It is always the serious books that get sat on—how much better to suppress Mrs. Glyn" (*Letters* 85). In Huxley's oppositional equation, Glyn and the feelies represent the popular

pleasures that “mean a lot of agreeable sensations to the audience”; “the serious books” are represented by Lawrence here, and by the second intertext of *Three Weeks in a Helicopter: Othello*.

Throughout *Brave New World*, Huxley juxtaposes the feelies with Shakespeare. After John returns from his trip to the feelies, he turns to *The Complete Works of Shakespeare*, which he has smuggled in from the Indian Reservation. He “turned with religious care its stained and crumbled pages, and began to read *Othello*. *Othello*, he remembered, was like the hero of *Three Weeks in a Helicopter*—a black man” (171).<sup>18</sup> Visiting Eton, John asks “Do they read Shakespeare?” He is told that the library “contains only books of reference. If our young people need distraction, they can get it at the feelies. We don’t encourage them to indulge in any solitary amusements” (163). In *Brave New World* Shakespeare’s work has been severed from its theatricality, as Huxley figures it not in its enacted form but in the more threatening private experience of reading.

Its title acidly deploying a Shakespearean phrase, *Brave New World* has Shakespeare represent the lost values of what Huxley sees as civilization and culture. On another level, Huxley’s choice of Shakespeare as the foil for Glyn and the feelies reflects the central role Shakespeare played in early cinema history. The silent film industry frequently turned to Shakespeare for its adaptations—from Herbert Tree’s *King John* (1899) onward, including Buchowetzki’s *Othello* (1922)<sup>19</sup>—in an effort to elevate the medium’s status. Such productions introduced the irony of “silent Shakespeare” and led to vigorous debates about the relationship between cinema and theater. “As soon as the new art” (cinema), writes Rick Altman, “found the leisure to contemplate its own position it felt compelled to differentiate itself from its renowned parent, the theater” (Introduction 13). The competition became much more intense once sound film began to challenge what had previously been thought to be the stage’s advantage (words); in this discussion, Shakespeare is constantly invoked as the best that theater has to offer and the best that British culture offers against the onslaught of popular culture that was increasingly identified as American.<sup>20</sup>

When Mond and John discuss Shakespeare in *Brave New World*, John laments the passing of “old things” such as books because

“the new ones are so stupid and horrible. Those plays, where there’s nothing but helicopters flying about and you *feel* the people kissing.” He made a grimace. “Goats and monkeys!” Only

in *Othello*'s words could he find an adequate vehicle for his contempt and hatred. (219)

The words refer to Iago's speech about trying to obtain visual proof of Desdemona's infidelity: "It is impossible you should see this, / Were they as prime as goats, as hot as monkeys" (3.3.402–03). For John, the feelies promote voyeurism, showing publicly and en masse what should be intimate, individual experience. He insists to Mond that

"*Othello*'s good. . . . *Othello*'s better than those feelies."

"Of course it is," the Controller agreed. "But that's the price we have to pay for stability. You've got to choose between happiness and what people used to call high art. We've sacrificed the high art. We have the feelies and the scent organ instead."

"But they don't mean anything."

"They mean themselves; they mean a lot of agreeable sensations to the audience."

"But they're . . . they're told by an idiot." (220–21)

This discussion reiterates Huxley's formulations in "Pleasures" and goes even further in articulating the cultural divide between new popular amusements and Shakespeare. When John mistakenly calls the feelies "plays," expecting them to have "meaning," and Mond corrects him that their importance is not their content but rather their "agreeable sensations," Huxley opposes meaning to sensation and pleasure. Culture can have either meaning or it can deliver "agreeable sensations to the audience," but not both.<sup>21</sup> Hence Mond describes the pleasure of the feelies as a tautology: "they mean themselves." Again, Gunning's concept of the "cinema of attractions" is apt here as Huxley suggests that the cheap desire for stimulation remains cinema's (and the popular novel's) main appeal, while more refined forms of literature such as Shakespeare offer more dignified and valuable pleasures of narrative significance and complexity.

The feelies empty *Othello* of its driving emotion—passion—in order to serve the needs of a culture that prescribes periodic "Violent Passion Substitutes" to keep people properly subdued. Vicarious, mediated activities such as the feelies "ensure that the release of pent-up sexuality in leisure . . . never gets out of control, never becomes impassioned" (Wollen 58). *Othello* is played here for its most sensational elements and expunged of its linguistic beauty and philosophical weight. Even for John, the echoes



of *Othello* in *Three Weeks in a Helicopter* are mainly somatic. When Lenina tries to seduce him, “inevitably he found himself thinking of the embraces in *Three Weeks in a Helicopter*. Ooh! ooh! the stereoscopic blonde and ahh! the more than real blackamoor” (192).<sup>22</sup>

The feely focuses on taboo: free love (against which the maniacal monogamy of the “blackamoor” is cast) and miscegenation, the latter being more complicated. Huxley was not alone in associating cinema with racial otherness and blackness in particular. In 1929, the British film journal *Close Up* devoted a special issue to “The Negro in Film” from which, Jane Gaines observes, “one receives the impression that the Negro was in vogue in London for the first time” (1). The editor of *Close Up*, Kenneth Macpherson, “lament[ed] the passing of the silent film: he concurred with others that the only consolation was that the talkies now made it possible to *hear* the Negro for the first time” (Gaines 1). The blackamoor in the feely and Al Jolson’s blackface in *The Jazz Singer* associate blackness with a kind of fashionable exoticism, with simultaneous modernity (jazz, cinema) and primitivism, with physicality and with the talkies. “Again and again,” Miriam Hansen observes, “writings on the American cinema of the interwar period stress the new physicality, the exterior surface or ‘outer skin’ of things” (70). This is certainly true of *Three Weeks in a Helicopter*, with its fetishistic emphasis on the “blackamoor” and the bearskin rug.

There is a curious congruence of racial mixing and the talkies throughout Huxley’s work. Both “Silence Is Golden” and *Three Weeks in a Helicopter* showcase racial masquerade and miscegenation. Al Jolson’s famous “Mammy” scene, to which Huxley calls such attention, has another “racial” layer beyond the image of the white man in blackface. Al Jolson’s character is from an orthodox Jewish family; as he puts on his black make-up and prepares for an opening-night performance on Broadway that will keep him from honoring his father’s dying wish that he sing *Kol Nidre* in the synagogue, he describes his hesitations to his love interest, Mary (a shiksa whose status worries Jolson’s character’s mother, adding another “racial” tension to the film’s story): “There’s something, after all, in my heart—maybe it is the call of the ages—the cry of my race.” “Race” is a “special effect” in *The Jazz Singer*, an identity that can be painted on. The black-and-white film stock of the early teens and twenties was animated by contrast: the less subtle the better. While Huxley does not comment overtly on the racial dimensions of *The Jazz Singer* in “Silence Is Golden,” his concentration on Al Jolson’s blackface performance suggests that it

drew his attention, and the film's preoccupation with racial and ethnic contrast does appear in Huxley's description of how the members of the band in *The Jazz Singer* "belong to two contrasted races—dark and polished Hebrews and chubby young Nordics [with faces like] undercooked muffins" (55). Here "race" is read precisely as the "outer skin of things," as color and the consistency of flesh on the screen. But race went deeper for Huxley. Throughout his writings on cinema, he expresses anti-Semitic paranoia about Hollywood, which he feared was run by "Jews with money."<sup>23</sup> His association of cinema with both blackness and Jewishness, and more generally with racial promiscuity, resembles nothing so much as the fearful rhetoric of "degeneration," with its anxiety that certain forms of culture have a corrosive social influence.

At the same time, as with the debased but seductive Lenina, Huxley himself plays on the excitement of these taboo representations in the feelies. Here *Three Weeks in a Helicopter* seems to evoke another inter-text: white slavery films.<sup>24</sup> This genre of "vice films," especially popular in the teens, told melodramatic stories of young girls being kidnapped and forced into "slavery," a code name for prostitution. Shelley Stamp argues that films such as *White Slave Traffic* and *Traffic in Souls* responded to anxiety about young women's new urban recreation culture, and particularly cinema as one of those pursuits. "Cinemas were described by many observers as arenas of particular carnal license, where women were alternately preyed upon by salacious men . . . and themselves tempted to engage in untoward conduct" (47). The beta blonde's sexualized "enslavement" to the blackamoor plays on what Judith Walkowitz has described as a sensational, even pornographic, excitement underpinning the white slavery scare at the turn of the century as well as the fantasy of miscegenation. Huxley reaffirms racial stereotypes and anxieties even as he mocks contemporary films that exploited these stereotypes.

The representation of black sexuality in films of the twenties was vexed, whether in *Birth of a Nation*, with its scene of a black man chasing a white woman, or "race films" like Oscar Micheaux's. In *Three Weeks in a Helicopter* Huxley exploits the persistent fantasy of black male sexuality threatening white womanhood in a scene that would have been banned under the explicit direction of the Motion Picture Production Code of 1930, better known as the Hays Code, that "Miscegenation (sex relationships between the White and Black races) is forbidden" (qtd. in Leff and Simmons 288).<sup>25</sup> Indeed, everything about the feely, from the kisses to

the interracial romp on the bearskin, would have been unrepresentable in mainstream cinema in 1932.

The tigerskin and bearskin, the goats and monkeys, the pig's dung and the feelies' stalls, and the "big game photographer" Napoleon Bonaparte tracking John all contribute to a strong sense of bestiality and mindlessness surrounding the feelies, of physical transgression and cultural regression that Huxley associates with film and especially with the talkies. He presents cinematic progress as at a crossroads between new and old pleasures, between the serious, thoughtful world of *Othello* and the decadent, sybaritic world of Glyn. The talkies, he suggests, are moving cinema toward dangerous, even animalistic, pleasures: a proposition that is strengthened but also complicated by a further cinematic allusion in *Three Weeks in a Helicopter*.

## The Savage of Surrey

John's feely epitaph, *The Savage of Surrey*, along with other feelies mentioned in *Brave New World*—"the famous all-howling stereoscopic feely of the gorillas' wedding" (253) and *The Sperm Whale's Love-Life*, which Darwin Bonaparte considers the gold standard in feelatography—indicate that Huxley had a particular kind of film in mind when he invented the feelies: documentary. While the coyly titled films seem ludicrously far-fetched, they are not far off from the titles of real ethnographic and nature documentaries that were hugely popular in Britain in the twenties. The foremost among these was a series called *Secrets of Nature*, sponsored by British Instructional from 1922 to 1933. In her history of British cinema, Rachel Low notes:

The excellence and popular success of the *Secrets of Nature* films was one of the few bright features of the British film industry during the twenties. . . . They were liked by both ordinary audiences and highbrows. (1918–1929 130–31)

Screened before feature-length films, *Secrets of Nature* focused on topics such as the habits of the cuckoo or plant growth: *Romance in a Pond*, for example, investigates the life cycle of newts. In their 1933 book *Secrets of Nature*, Mary Field ("the only Englishwoman at present directing talking pictures" [4]) and Percy Smith ("an expert on micro-cinematography") remark that when *Secrets of Nature* "went talky," it faced the same obstacles that other kinds of films did:

Experiments have shown that the majority of cinema-goers cannot both look and listen. When they go to the pictures they have the tendency to look, for had they wished to listen, they would have stayed at home and turned on the wireless. (214)

According to David King Dunaway, these documentaries were Huxley's favorite kind of film, and "in particular his favorite [was] *The Sex Life of Lobsters*" (350). Huxley's brother Julian, who was active in the popularization of biology, narrated and directed an Oscar-winning film called *The Private Life of the Gannets* (1935). Although both titles sound like feelies, Huxley often praised documentary film.<sup>26</sup> In 1929 he writes that he is "personally . . . very fond" of "the documentary film which shows me places I have never visited, strange animals, odd people, queer trades. . . . *Nanook* and *Chang* and *Moana* are delightful, imaginative liberations for those who have undergone long slavery in the world of adult interest" (*Essays* 3: 13–14).

Huxley was always fascinated by educational systems, whether examining social conditioning in *Brave New World* or, in 1929, exploring the pedagogical potential of film in *Vanity Fair* ("The Critic in the Crib," *Essays* 3: 10–14), an interest shared by many other critics. As early as 1914, Shaw wrote:

The cinematograph begins educating people when the projection lantern begins clicking, and does not stop until it leaves off. Whether it is shewing you what the South Polar ice barrier is like through the films of Mr Ponting [*90 Degrees South* (1911–1912)], or making you silly and sentimental by pictorial novelets, it is educating you all the time. (7)

Indeed, he adds, the cinema "is educating you far more effectively when you think it is only amusing you than when it is avowedly instructing you in the habits of lobsters."<sup>27</sup> Of course, Huxley's version of educational film in *Brave New World* is far from exemplary. John visits the Eton "Beta-Minus geography room," where the students are watching an ethnographic film about the Penitentes of the Savage Reservation beating themselves. The students roar with laughter while Bernard takes advantage of "the cinematographical twilight" to make a pass at the Head Mistress. John, meanwhile, is "pained" and "bewildered" (162–63). This distorted scene of cinema as education in *Brave New World* reflects real discussions among some early film critics. In 1924 the British film journal *Bioscope* ran a

column by Leonard Donaldson arguing that the cinema could be used to “prepare the scholar for the workshop and factory” and, by “portray[ing] various industrial processes,” could “promote the general welfare and safety of the worker” (51), a view that seems parodied in films such as Chaplin’s *Modern Times*. As a mass medium, cinema could “form the mind of England” as Shaw predicted, but it could also *deform* the mind of England as it does in *Brave New World*. In one of his earliest responses to film, Huxley wrote in 1916 that *Birth of a Nation*

is said to mark quite a new epoch in cinematographic art. In time, no doubt, we shall have cinemas being bought up by the political parties for propagandist work, in which they will soon excel even the newspapers. The effect of them in China is said to be prodigious, while Rumania is described as a Cinematocracy.  
(*Letters* 94–95)

While Huxley briefly remarks on the art of De Mille’s racially inflammatory epic, he is far more interested in the propagandistic implications of cinema than its aesthetic possibilities.

One way Huxley’s concern about the possible sociopolitical function of the talkies emerges in *Brave New World* is as a sly joke. The sleep-teaching that impresses the values of Our Ford is said to have been discovered by Reuben Rabinovitch, “the child of Polish-speaking parents” (23), who was put to bed while the radio was left on and awoke “repeating word for word a long lecture by that curious old writer . . . George Bernard Shaw, who was speaking, according to a well-authenticated tradition, about his own genius” (24). Shaw’s reputation as a social reformer and didact made him a natural target for Huxley, and the details of the scene are drawn from a web of associations linking Shaw to cinema history. After the coming of sound, Shaw stood by his earlier statement about the importance of film; he was garrulous on the subject of the talkies, as for instance in his 1930 article “GBS—‘Talkie Prophet’” (70–71). In 1936 he wrote, “The silent film was no use to me. . . . When movies became talkies my turn came” (qtd. in Dukore xviii). Huxley seems to have perceived Shaw, the most famous living British playwright, taking up the mantle of “Talkie Prophet” as an alarming sign, and Reuben Rabinovitch’s subliminal Shavian lesson is connected to the talkies through *The Jazz Singer*, whose hero is called Jakie Rabinowitz. Arguably the most famous mouthpiece of the talkies, he delivers the first recorded, nonsung words of the film: “Wait

a minute, you ain't heard nothin' yet!" Huxley uses this Rabinowitz/Rabinovitch character to draw the familiar analogy between the talkies and hypnosis. Casting Shaw in the role of droning hypnotist, Huxley knocks GBS from what Huxley perceived as a smug pedestal of self-regard and also insinuates that talkies' effects could be as insidious as radio, which, with print media, was the main vehicle of propaganda at this time. The talkies could surpass both newspapers and radio by mobilizing words and images, and the feelies portend an even more intrusive, manipulative future for film.

Shortly after the publication of *Brave New World*, in a 1935 *Daily Express* article, Huxley made a series of predictions about how life would look in 1960. He devotes considerable space to prophecies about the cinema. "As for the talkies . . . they took to color in the early forties and become stereoscopic about nine years later" (*Essays* 3: 424). He forecasts that actors began "having themselves fitted with synthetic voices" and that politicians followed suit:

Ministries of Propaganda found that it was possible to supply dictators, monarchs, and even democratic Prime Ministers with a brand of synthetic eloquence incomparably more moving than that of the greatest orators of previous epochs. (3: 424)

Here, as with the feelies, Huxley builds on the commonplace association of the talkies with sensual experience to imagine cinema as a bodily apparatus that is also inevitably a political instrument. While many of his contemporaries found the talkies excessive or confusing, Huxley expands on those reactions to explore the social and political implications of sound film. If the feelies suggest that Huxley was one of the great naysayers about cinematic development, they also suggest that few took the talkies more seriously.

## Huxley and Hollywood

In a development not anticipated by his early writings on film, in 1938 Huxley moved to Hollywood, the home of "standardized amusement" and "Elinor Glyn Ltd.," and spent the rest of his life there. His friendships with figures such as Charlie Chaplin and Anita Loos allowed him access to the inner circles of Hollywood. Along with other expatriates including Evelyn Waugh, Huxley worked as a scriptwriter for the major

studios. Most of the projects with which he was involved were adaptations of literary classics—*Pride and Prejudice* (1940) and *Jane Eyre* (1944)—or similarly “highbrow” projects such as *Madame Curie* (1943). These were commercially successful examples of entertainment combining “old” and “new” pleasures, a combination that had seemed elusive to Huxley in the twenties. While he continued to write about cinema satirically in *After Many a Summer Dies the Swan* (1939) and *Ape and Essence* (1948), his participation in a developing industry that produced films such as *Citizen Kane* changed his perception of film’s possibilities.<sup>28</sup>

Huxley made two attempts to adapt *Brave New World* to visual forms. In a 1945 letter to Loos, he proposes a film that would “revolve around the person of a very clever but physically unattractive scientist, desperately trying to make a gorgeous blonde, who is repelled by his pimples but fascinated by the intelligence of his conversation” (535). This figure, who seems to be a stand-in for Lenina (or perhaps the Beta blonde of *Three Weeks in a Helicopter*), sounds suspiciously like Loos’s most famous heroine, Lorelei Lei of *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* (1925). “In the end,” Huxley continues, the scientist “makes violent passes at the blonde, gets his face slapped and is left disconsolate among the white mice and the rabbit ova—an emblem of personal frustration who is yet the most revolutionary and subversive force in the modern world.” The project never got off the ground because RKO owned the dramatic rights to the novel and would not allow it to be produced (Clark 62).

More startling is Huxley’s subsequent attempt, in 1956, to adapt *Brave New World* to perhaps the least likely genre. He writes in several letters that he is at work on

a musical comedy version of *Brave New World*—for everyone tells me that science fiction can never succeed on the stage as a straight play, but that it will be accepted when the medium ceases to be realistic and makes use of music and lyrics. (*Letters* 808)

The exchange between film and literature became more fluid in the forties and fifties, the golden age of Broadway musicals such as *Oklahoma!* (1943), *South Pacific* (1949), *Guys and Dolls* (1950), *Candide* (1956), *West Side Story* (1957), and Loos’s own *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* (1949). Jerome Meckier speculates that “Perhaps Huxley conceived of musical comedy—the musical comedy of ideas—as the ideal form for bridging the ever-widening gap between high seriousness and popular entertainment”

(106). Huxley's musical adaptation of *Brave New World* came shortly after MGM's *Singin' in the Rain* (1952), with its comic treatment of the talkies. With the turn to the musical, shaped around song and dance numbers, film was, in some senses, turning back toward its roots in the music hall. This comes across strongly in Huxley's three-act musical version of *Brave New World*, which contains nine bizarre songs and several equally odd dances, including a kinetic "Death Conditioning" ballet and a soft-shoe shuffle involving workers in the hatchery singing "Everybody's Happy Now." At another point, Huxley revisits precisely the scene that so horrified him in *The Jazz Singer*—a scene straight from the music hall—and replays it as pure absurdity: a character "falls on one knee, in the attitude of Al Jolson," and sings not "Mammy" but "Bottle of Mine," an ode to the bottle from which he was "decanted" (44). As theater becomes more like film, film becomes, once again, more like the stage, suggesting that the strict boundaries for artistic forms that Huxley advocated earlier, as a means of keeping the talkies at bay, had crumbled by the mid-fifties.

Huxley gave his script to several readers, including Chaplin and Leonard Bernstein, but he never managed to find someone to write the score, and the musical was never produced. While it is a weak derivative of the novel, the musical does show Huxley reconfiguring and solving some of the problems that preoccupied him in the novel. The most striking change is the character of Lenina, who is less sexually aggressive and much more intelligent than she is in the novel. She joins John in reading *The Complete Works of Shakespeare*, and in the conclusion of the musical—where Huxley takes the "third alternative" (ix) he mentions in his 1946 foreword to *Brave New World*—Lenina and John depart to join a community of like-minded exiles in Tahiti. In Lenina's transformation, Huxley has traded in *Othello* for *The Tempest* and, of course, *My Fair Lady*.

Huxley's treatment of the feelies in the musical is similarly lighter than in the novel. In act 1, Joe, a beta minus, steals and gobbles up some of Lenina's soma and makes a pass at her: "Listen, Baby. Let's you and I go to the feelies tonight. I hear there's a wonderful show at the Piccadilly Palace." She turns him down "with dignity": "Nothing doing, I think your behavior is lousy and unethical." Joe persists: "Boy meets pneumatic girl on a foam rubber mattress with a chinchilla slip cover. You can feel that fur all over you—every single hair of it. They say it's terrific" (41). Riffing again on Glyn's tigerskin, now a chinchilla, Huxley has made the feelies tawdrier, but they remain a verbal reference—more like a dirty joke than



a major sign of cultural decline, as they are in the novel. Significantly, Huxley chooses not to stage the feelies.<sup>29</sup> By the early 1950s, sound film was fully assimilated and cinema did not take on any more sensual properties (other than becoming colorized). Still, what would it have meant to represent the feelies on film or on stage? One imagines a *mis-en-abîme* effect, or something like the “pleasure organ” in *Barbarella*, or John Waters’s *Odorama*. It seems fitting that the feelies never made it to the big screen, for any effort to depict them cinematically would necessarily dilute their polysensual dimensions. Almost 75 years after *Brave New World* was published, the movies are still not “stereoscopic,” and commercial films are still incapable of making an audience feel the hairs on a tigerskin rug. The irony is that the feelies, an incarnation of pure physical experience in *Brave New World*, cannot themselves be embodied or represented visually. Despite Huxley’s anxious predictions about cinema bringing on the end of real culture, his own most fearsome representation of cinema’s future, the feelies, only exists through the written word. Literature, not film, remains the medium most capable of imagining and representing the most spectacular of pleasures.

## Notes

1. See “Spectrum of Opinion, 1928–1929” in Harry Geduld’s *The Birth of the Talkies*.

2. Shaw’s thoughts on the cinema were not always out of step with Huxley’s. When Shaw saw D.W. Griffith’s *Intolerance* in 1917, he wrote, “it was the most damnable entertainment and the wickedest waste of money within my experience. It was like turning over the leaves of a badly illustrated Bible (in monthly parts) for three hours that were like three years” (23). In a 1914 *New Statesman* interview he remarked:

The cinema tells its story to the illiterate as well as to the literate; and it keeps its victim (if you like to call him so) not only awake but fascinated as if by a serpent’s eye. And that is why the cinema is going to produce effects that all the cheap books in the world could never produce. (9)

3. See Benjamin’s “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction” and “On Some Motifs in Baudelaire” in *Illuminations*.

4. See Loiperdinger.

5. There is some irony in Huxley's fascination with cinema: he was rendered nearly blind from an illness when he was 16. He had to sit in the front row of films, and one wonders how well he saw even then.
6. Cinema shares many of these features with theater, but critics typically maintained that there is a "striking difference between [the filmgoer] and the theatergoer" (Kracauer, *Theory* 159).
7. In her generally enthusiastic *Let's Go to the Movies*, Barry flatly states that "The cinema is a drug" (53). As Kracauer notes, "from the twenties to the present day, the devotees of film and its opponents alike have compared the medium to a sort of drug and have drawn attention to its stupefying effects," suggesting that "the cinema has its habitués who frequent it out of an all but physiological urge" (*Theory* 159).
8. Even when traveling in Malaysia Huxley manages to find a film screening to excoriate, here as an instrument of colonial modernity:

The violent imbecilities of the story flickered in silence against the background of the equatorial night. In silence the Javanese looked on. What were they thinking? What were their private comments on this exhibition of Western civilization? . . . The world into which the cinema introduces the subject peoples is a world of silliness and criminality. (*Jesting Pilate* 224–25)
9. That cinematic pleasures are the product of "interminable democracies" is an insight into Huxley's politics of the 1930s. For an account of his politics at this point—his conflicted feeling about democracy and his interest in eugenics even as he writes *Brave New World*—see David Bradshaw.
10. The 1929 film *Broadway Melody* first used this slogan, which was mocked by Ernest Betts in 1930 as "All-talking, all-singing, all-nothing."
11. Since the 1980s many critics have demonstrated that the relationship between modernism and mass or popular culture is much more complex than one of simple opposition, entailing local histories and significances that elude the dichotomy of a great divide. Modernism defines itself against popular culture but also enjoys and exploits it. See for example the anthologies on modernism and popular culture edited by James Naremore and Patrick Brantlinger and by Maria Di Battista and Lucy McDiarmid. See also Michael North's *Reading 1922*, which reconsiders Huyssen's paradigm, David Chinitz's and Barry J. Faulk's articles on Eliot's ambivalent relationship to popular culture, and Allison Pease's work on modernism and pornography.

12. Certainly there are representations of pleasure in modernism, but they are never far from a kind of manic, desperate energy. In a 1963 essay called "The Fate of Pleasure," Lionel Trilling contends that "at some point in modern history, the principle of pleasure came to be regarded with . . . ambivalence" (434), which develops fully into a "repudiation of pleasure" (439) with modernists, who regard conventional pleasures as a false consolation, a "specious good" (441), and this, along with a desire to destroy "the habits, manners, and 'values' of the bourgeois world" (442), results in a "devaluation of the pleasure principle" (443–44). While this reading of modernism has been questioned by critics such as Perry Meisel, others continue to write about pleasure as a "problem" for modernism not just thematically and ideologically but also formally. Leonard Diepeveen argues that modernists redefined the nature of readerly pleasure to include the struggle with difficulty (150); Richard Poirier writes that "Modernism happened when reading got to be grim" (105). These observations suggest that modernists seek not just to repudiate pleasure but also to put in its place a kind of anhedonia.

13. In 1936 Huxley reported on his recent visit to "a gigantic new movie palace" in Margate. "Its name implied a whole social program, a complete theory of art; it was called 'Dreamland'" (*Essays* 4: 25). Huxley describes this forerunner of cineplexes as a totalitarian order like *Brave New World*.

14. Graves and Hodge assert that Glyn was "not read by the more discriminating," yet many modernists reference her work. Nigel Brooks explores Fitzgerald's reworking of *Three Weeks* in *The Great Gatsby*. Virginia Woolf wrote about Glyn in a 1917 diary entry: "Expecting life & smartness at least I spent 8d upon a Magazine with Mrs Asquith's love letters, & they're as flat & feeble & vulgar & illiterate as a provincial Mrs Glyn might be" (71).

15. Frank Kermode considers *Three Weeks* as an exploration of national identity and masculinity.

16. See David Trotter, George Robb, and Chris Waters for sociopolitical readings of Glyn's novel.

17. The 1924 film was titled *Romance of a Queen* (Goldwyn).

18. This slip—the blackamoor is the hero and not the villain?—is unexplained.

19. See Robert Ball, John Collick, John P. McCombe, and Roberta E. Pearson on early adaptations of Shakespeare for the screen.

20. Asked in a 1915 interview "What the Films May Do to the Drama," Shaw replied:

When they can see and hear Forbes-Robertson's *Hamlet* equally well produced, it will be possible for our young people to grow up in healthy remoteness from the crowded masses and slums of big cities without also growing up as savages. (18)

This is a rare vision of cinema as harmonious rather than competitive with theater and not inextricably linked to modernity. Its unusual optimism is perhaps attributable to the date, well before the talkies were a realizable technological prospect. Huxley's pessimistic view in *Brave New World* is more representative: it is the "savage" who most appreciates Shakespeare.

21. Huxley's distaste for the "agreeable sensations" produced by cinema, his preference for content over form, and his interest in social meaning over aesthetics all indicate the ways in which he is difficult to classify as a modernist in the conventional sense of the term.

22. James Sexton has pointed out that the theme of sexual jealousy in the feely is central to *Othello* and to the Savage's tormented relationship with Lenina Crowne.

23. See, for example, Huxley's 1926 letter to Percy Smith, 266.

24. Thanks to Celia Marshik for pointing out this connection to me.

25. See also Linda Williams and Lucy Bland.

26. In "Silence Is Golden" Huxley lauds the "fascinating Events of The Week" newsreels (*Essays* 2: 28). In *Heaven and Hell* he praises colored documentaries as "a notable new form of popular visionary art" and explicitly mentions Disney's *The Living Desert*, with "the immensely magnified cactus blossoms, into which . . . the spectator finds himself sinking" (168).

27. Low notes that in 1934

the first group of classroom films to be issued in Britain were *Shakespeare*, a one-reeler . . . about Shakespeare's biographical and historical background, and three physiology one-reelers, *Breathing*, *The Blood*, and *Circulation*. (1929-1939 26)

These are two of Huxley's favorite subjects, Shakespeare and documentary.

28. Alongside this transformation, Huxley's views of drugs changed radically. Not only did he find value in the intelligent use of drugs such as LSD, but he also proposed that drugs could serve socially useful purposes, expanding consciousness and creativity.

29. Huxley does, however, represent the newer visual technology, television, in the musical, and it plays a role similar to that in Orwell's *1984*, as mass media have encroached even further into the lives of citizens, making their way out of the feely palace and into the private home.

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